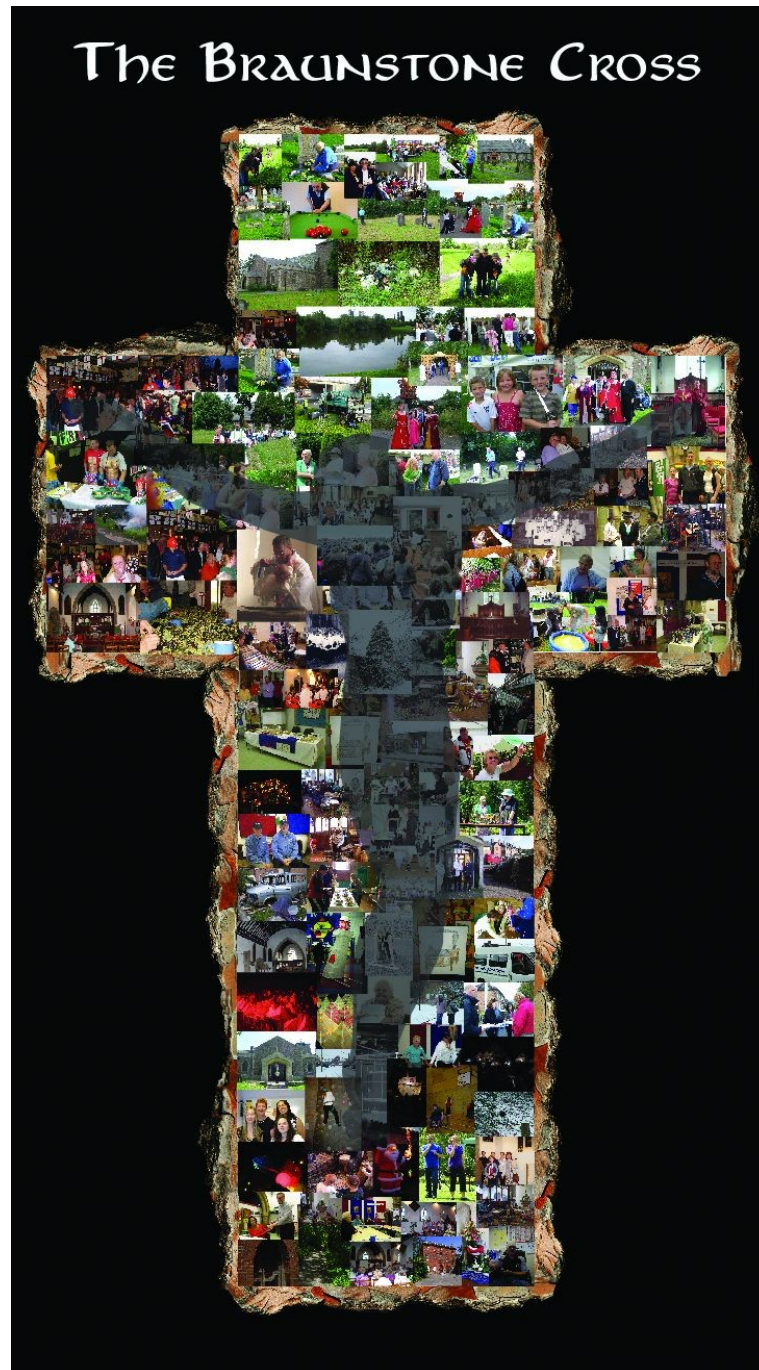


A Reflection on Community Work at St Peter's Church, Braunstone, Leicester



**Chris Florance
September 2009**

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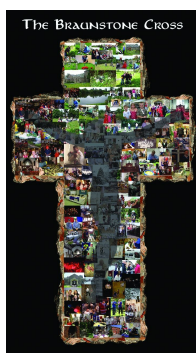
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The Braunstone Cross

(See Front Cover)



The Braunstone Cross came into being in the Autumn of 2007. For a long time I had been aware of the community crosses from El Salvador, and the thinking behind them. The illustrations on the cross were scenes from the daily life of a community, including the familiar local flora and fauna. Over time, as life became challenging through war and poverty, they came to incorporate these difficult and oppressive aspects. But they would also depict people's hopes for their community, particularly through the eyes of women and the poor.

This ethos, emanating from Latin America, lies behind the Braunstone Cross, which is an expression of life in Braunstone. As a piece of community art, it had been an idea in my mind for some time. Through photographs, it celebrates the positive aspects of life without avoiding the difficult and painful aspects of people's experience in the Braunstone community.

When the diocese held a Regeneration and Culture event in the Cathedral in October 2007, we were spurred on to make the Braunstone Cross a reality. With funding from a trust and photographs from across the area, we produced a cross that stands over 2 metres high. It has visual impact and has been well received by friends and partners.

For me the cross encapsulates my approach to my work as a church-based community worker. It is about being there with those difficult aspects of life: illness, disability, death, debt, loss, breakdown and vulnerability. But it is also a symbol of hope and healing. Many of the photos depict celebrations, for example the Braunstone Carnival or a church wedding or festival. Among them is a shadowy figure in grey: hard to make out on the full-sized banner but visible at a distance and in the smaller image on the front cover. It is the crucified Christ, present in our community, offering growth, healing and reconciliation without coercion to anyone who seeks him.

Executive Summary

- I have been employed since 2000 as the Community Worker at St Peter's Braunstone, on the western edge of Leicester.
- Braunstone, a large council estate with multiple deprivations, was selected for a government grant of nearly £50 million under the New Deal for Communities programme. My post was directly related to this initiative.
- The introductory chapters (Section 1) describe some of the thinking behind the post, and outline its setting up and structure.
- The bulk of the report (Section 2) describes a number of pieces of work I did, mostly in partnership with others from voluntary, statutory and church agencies. I reflect on their impact on the life of the church and estate, especially in relation to the values of Christian faith and community development that underlie what I have tried to do.
- In the final chapters (Section 3) I bring these reflections together, attempting to draw out my own personal learning, pointers for further work by the local church (St Peter's) and lessons which I think can be learned by the wider Church and society.
- One key feature of my work has been a desire to let local people set the agenda: my role has been to listen, and help them to articulate what they really want. I have been helped in this by my freedom from the external pressures often faced by community workers, of having to tick boxes and meet short-term deadlines: community development is an organic process which must be allowed to take time.
- While the Braunstone estate has been my "patch", I have had a role in helping the congregation of St Peter's to develop as well. The final few months of my employment here will be committed to empowering St Peter's to carry on its creative involvement in the community, after my departure in July 2010.

1.1 Introduction

In 2010 my contract as the community worker for St Peter's Church, Braunstone Park is due to finish. In this report I reflect on my nine years working here. To be in such a position for a relatively long time is unusual in this field of work, where funding often dictates that two or three year contracts are the norm.

I wish to reflect on the changes that have taken place in Braunstone over these nine years in the context of the New Deal for Communities programme. I will also look at how St Peter's has engaged in its locality, and how the work has been undertaken.

The wider church may find parts of this story helpful when it considers community development as part of its mission, particularly in an urban or estate context. And what we have learned here may be useful to government and civil society, as they consider how to engage in a locality.

Although this is a very personal narrative, colleagues, church members and local people were invited to feed into my thinking, so that their views have informed this report.

To facilitate this process, we set up a “wiki”, where people were invited to contribute their thoughts and memories to a regular emailed question. This was supplemented by a few interviews with local colleagues together with a timeline, where colleagues, residents and church members were able to identify the key events and activities from over the last nine years.



Collage by local children after a visit to Bradgate Park

I.2 Community Development and Christian Faith

When the church (locally and in the Diocese) decided to engage in the wider community alongside the New Deal for Communities initiative, it was decided to take a community development approach. This decision was based on the knowledge and experience gained from the Faith in the City report and the work undertaken across the country in inner city and estate areas. Community Development takes a holistic approach to social justice, rather than focusing on particular aspects of poverty, such as unemployment or homelessness.

There is a philosophy and tradition underpinning true community development work. The professional standards body (Paulo)¹ defines it in this way:

“The key purpose of community development work is collectively to bring about social change and justice, by working with communities to:

- identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities;
 - plan, organise and take action;
 - evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action;
- all in ways which challenge oppressions and tackle inequalities.”

Community Development necessarily focuses on communities experiencing deprivation. A community can either be a geographical area or an interest group, and deprivation should be understood in its widest sense. At its heart there is a desire to bring about a positive and effective change to people's lives.

Faith Context

“The values of community development work are strongly related to the values we hold as Christians – they mark our ministries through: 'integrity, honesty, inclusiveness, recognising all people as valuable and equal as made in God's image, love for one another as for ourselves, respect of dignity for others, the integrity of all creation and the interdependence of all creatures of the earth.’” (United Reformed Church 2003)²

Coming from a faith background, the values of my Christian faith inform and strengthen how I see the values of community development. I have always been clear that I come from St Peter's and that we (the local church) wish to see a better estate.

Braunstone has benefited from the interest and support of both the Bishop and Archdeacon, who are both committed to social justice and experienced at working in urban areas. And, as will be seen later, the community development aspect of the local church's mission has been supported by several people within the area and congregation, as well as church leaders outside it.

1 (Paulo) 'National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work' – Updated January 2003 available from - http://www.cdx.org.uk/files/u1/pational_Standards_for_Community_Development.pdf

2 available from - http://www.ccwa.org.uk/v2/index.php?section_list=About_CCWA&content_name=cd_princ

1.3 Background to the Post

When the new Labour government came into power in 1997 it identified 30 of the poorest areas in England to receive a significant injection of funding and attention. The aim of this New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme was to begin to reverse the decades of decline and neglect. One of those areas identified was Braunstone, which was allocated £49.5 million over a seven year period (initially). Its focuses were: uniting Braunstone (previously a divided estate), education, the environment, health, community safety and employment. In the light of such a significant initiative in the area, the then Rector, Rajinder Daniel, appointed me as a community worker to serve alongside this process of regeneration.

The NDC area was served by two parishes: Holy Apostles, Leicester, and St Peter's, Braunstone. Holy Apostles appointed a community worker, Ruth Souter, at the same time. After Rajinder Daniel retired in 2001 the diocese decided to make some changes to the Parish of Braunstone. They redrew the parish boundaries so that St Peter's covered the whole NDC area. In 2002 Canon Chris Burch was appointed Priest in Charge.

My post was originally for 5 years. In 2003 the community work undertaken by St Peter's and Holy Apostles was evaluated by Roger Smith of Leicester University, who stressed the importance of continuity in community work. The Diocese bravely decided to provide half the funding for an extension, which was later extended again, bringing the total length of my contract to 10 years, the duration of the (also extended) NDC programme. The remainder of my funding came from the Church Urban Fund (CUF), the Kirby Laing Foundation and a local fund (the "Winstanley Fund") from the neighbouring parish of Holy Apostles. In 2007 the diocesan CUF representative, the Revd Mandy Ford, reviewed the work again, this time using participatory techniques that drew together local residents, church members and colleagues from the estate and neighbouring churches.

- August 1st 2000 Start of employment, as community worker occupying a team vicar's post (5 years' duration).
- October 2003 Review recommends greater continuity: parish and diocese consider how to implement this for my post.
- November 2004 Diocese approves half funding for a 3-year extension.
- August 2005 With other funds in place, extended employment begins.
- May 2007 NDC programme extension to 2010 leads diocese to offer half funding for a further 2 years. CUF and other bodies match this.
- August 2008 The final phase begins.
- March 2010 NDC programme scheduled to end.
- July 31st 2010 Community work post scheduled to end.

Line Managers: Team Rector, The Revd Rajinder Daniel (to August 2001)
 Social Responsibility Director, The Revd Martin Wilson (2001-2)
 Priest in charge, then Vicar, Canon Chris Burch (2002-2010)

Management Committee:

- Priests in charge of St Peter's and Holy Apostles (joint chairs)
- 2 reps each from St Peter's and Holy Apostles
- 2 reps from the diocese, including the CUF rep
- 1 rep invited from the BCA or other local agency

1.4 Job Descriptions

a) The original job description (2000)

- 1) to undertake a community audit of the needs of the area
- 2) to help to facilitate confidence-building in the community
- 3) to liaise with the New Deal for Communities director and his staff
- 4) to work with and give support to other community workers in the area, building networks with other appropriate local and national agencies
- 5) to look at the needs of young people, 12-25 years, especially males, to design a project to meet their needs and to find funding for the same
- 6) to work with New Deal initiatives on issues of employment and training
- 7) to facilitate appropriate use of the Community Centre at St Peter's in relation to other projects in the area
- 8) to develop Christian witness on the Thorpe Astley estate
- 9) to share in worship and pastoral ministry at St Peter's and St Crispin's

b) Notes on the above, written in 2004

- 1) After some initial research in the first year or two, this has been achieved in 2003-4.
- 2) This is now in the job purpose, and runs throughout the job description.
- 3) Still an ongoing aim – the BCA has had a traumatic and conflict-ridden time since 2000, and the steady input of Chris and others in the various local churches has provided some continuity: the 2003 evaluation used the phrase “social glue”. We feel the independence of the community worker is important, and have resisted going to the BCA for funding.
- 4) Chris' networking skills are second to none. The new emphasis on South Braunstone reflects the newly united parish, and South Braunstone is less well known by Chris than North.
- 5) Chris partially achieved this through the German exchange, but we now feel this is too specific and have rewritten it (see 5 in the new job description) to reflect what now needs to be done – Chris' role is to be less of a service deliverer, more of a facilitator and supporter.
- 6) This turned out to be unachievable, and has been dropped.
- 7) Chris has done this almost too well, and there's a danger of his being trapped in the Hall! – but we have taken steps to emphasise the development, not the management, aspects of this.
- 8) Removed from Chris' job in 2003, in response to the evaluation and in negotiation with the vicar of the neighbouring parish (originally part of the old Braunstone Team Ministry).
- 9) This would have been hard to require of a new and unknown worker, but in practice Chris' own convictions have made him an excellent team member, working and also praying with the newer colleagues – priest-in-charge and curate. The success of the team has to a great extent flowed from this, and we have written it into clause 1 of the new job description; without, however, the implicit expectation that Chris will be an extra curate when necessary!

c) Community Worker Job Description for 2005-8

Job purpose – to offer a Christian input in the community development and regeneration of the Braunstone Park New Deal for Communities area that is independent of the main protagonists and funders, building on the work of the previous project (as per its evaluation) and emphasising the “social capital” aspects of community development.

- 1) Work with, and as part of, the staff team of St Peter's, sharing in its life of prayer and enhancing the strengths of its different members – this to inform all other tasks and activities;
- 2) Work with the staff and volunteers of the Braunstone Community Association (the New Deal for Communities delivery agency), as a partner and, where appropriate, as “critical friend”;
- 3) Create and sustain networks with BCA and other staff working in the area, especially in the “Winstanley” area of South Braunstone, for mutual support and to enhance the community's development;
- 4) Enable the undertaking of community research and training as appropriate, in partnership with other agencies;
- 5) Seek ways of improving provision for *children and* young people in the area, by supporting *children's and* youth workers, through specific projects and activities, and in other ways as appropriate;
- 6) Undertake specific community development projects, which have included the development of the land around the church (with appropriate community consultation) and setting up a local credit union branch; *now in addition some important work with New Communities coming into Braunstone;*
- 7) Facilitate the ongoing development for community use of St Peter's Church Hall, and its management, including the supervision of a caretaker; *this task to be handed over this year;*
- 8) Work with church members to raise their awareness of community issues and involvement in community actions;
- 9) Seek appropriate participation in wider networks (including further training), for the worker's own development and for the common good.

(2007 amendments in italics)

Section 2 Work and Reflection

This, the largest part of the report, describes various pieces of work I engaged in during my time in Braunstone, and contains my reflections on their significance to the goals of Christian mission, understood in the sense of community development. Towards the end, there are some more general chapters which draw out my approach to the different people I worked with – colleagues in other organisations, the St Peter's staff team and the congregation. This is not meant to record everything I have been involved in, but draws out some of the key points that can help illustrate those reflections and offer snapshots of my work.

Comparing these pieces of work with my job description, it will be seen that some sprang directly out of it while others are more tangentially related. For instance, it was not envisaged at the beginning of my employment that work with people from New Communities and community cohesion, as understood by government, would be an such an issue within Braunstone. However, the opportunity when it came up was not to be missed – indeed, to have avoided it would, I believe, have been to sell short a vital Christian conviction as to the common humanity of all cultures and races.



'BigArt' from our Creative Summer Festival 2008

2.1 The Braunstone Community Association (BCA)

The New Deal for Communities (NDC) was announced in 1997. Its aim was to empower a whole community to raise itself out of deprivation, by investing intensively into it (typically £50 million into an area of about 5000 homes), and insisting that the spending of the money should be led by local residents, not Local Government or other statutory agencies.

A number of Urban Priority Areas across the country put in bids for an NDC programme: in many cases this required (and therefore gave rise to) a local Community Association, which gave a voice in the bidding to local residents. While I was not involved at this point, it seems that there were two principled approaches in Braunstone in the early days: one wished to concentrate on the social fabric and infrastructure (e.g. housing, crime and the fear of crime, education, health, etc.) while the other believed that regeneration would be achieved better by economic investment, such as job creation and small business start-up. Braunstone's bid was successful, and the investment programme started in 2000.

While both approaches were used, the social angle seems to have won to start with. Those who favoured the economic approach did not take this lying down, and formed an opposition to the Board. Sadly, this situation was exploited by a destructive element and life became very difficult for staff and volunteers alike. In the summer of 2002 the Chief Executive resigned, and the AGM in December 2002 was long and stormy. By March 2003 the Government Office for East Midlands (GOEM) was threatening to withdraw the funding for the whole programme.

The Bishop of Leicester had been following these events with concern, and asked the Archdeacon of Leicester to offer to become the Independent Chair of the BCA Board. Richard Atkinson had previous experience in a council estate parish with regeneration projects and a housing association, and began to draw together the various elements of the BCA that had threatened to fly apart. At this stage my own role was as an observer and "critical friend". Both Chris Burch and I attended board meetings and other public meetings, where we were occasionally able to make a constructive contribution from the edge of the debate.

Despite ongoing trouble, Richard Atkinson led the BCA through three productive years. Between 2005 and 2007 three important buildings were completed: a Sports and Leisure Centre, a Library and Community Centre and a new Health Centre. One part of the estate, long boarded up and condemned to demolition, was sold for £1 to a housing association who refurbished the dwellings and injected new life into the area. Partnership with the local police and other organisations (including extra funding) contributed to a dramatic reduction in crime, and the supply of security locks and peep-holes helped reduce the fear of crime, especially among older people.

A survey in 2007 revealed that, whereas in 2002 many people had wanted to leave the Braunstone estate, now there was a waiting list to move into it. An inspirational men's health project led to the creation of a men's fitness and diet club which changed many lives permanently for the better, and spread out to women and teenagers. A Sports Action Zone worked with these clubs, and is still going strong today. And there was an imaginative programme of investment in education, leading to the setting up of "Creative Braunstone". However, neither health nor educational attainment can be transformed by "quick fixes", even over ten years. Education in Braunstone has suffered for generations: it will need ongoing investment over generations.

More recently the BCA's profile has reduced, as its policy has been more settled and there has been less uncommitted money to decide how to spend. However, a "Business Box" was opened in 2008 to provide small units for start-up businesses, with administrative support to help people who have a marketable skill but need help. Thought has been given to the structure and role of the BCA, once the NDC funding comes to an end in 2010. It is intended that there shall be a self-funding Social Enterprise, whose profits go into a charitable trust that will continue to fund projects for the social uplift of the Braunstone community.

Throughout this time, members of St Peter's have been involved, from two Board members to participation in projects. One of our aims is that more St Peter's people should catch the vision and step into some of the involvements as I leave them. Already there is more active church participation in the community than there was in 2000.



Reflections

In 2000, expectations were high and people were excited about what NDC could do for the area. Programmes on the scale of NDC are always going to be difficult and traumatic to implement if they are to be effective. Regeneration is about new life and rebirth, which is never a pain free event. The NDC process had to confront an existing culture and form of governance that had allowed Braunstone to wither and not flourish; that status quo needed challenging.

Braunstone people are passionate about Braunstone. They love talking about their local environment, their history and their vision. Although NDC was meant to put residents at the heart of the scheme and local people were meant to be the decision makers, I don't believe that sufficient time and training were allowed for this in practice. In the early years there was tremendous pressure to spend the money and develop projects and initiatives. People were expected both to make the decisions, and to familiarise themselves with the new structures and bureaucracies beloved of large organisations.

Now that the BCA (or "B Inspired" as it is now known) has more or less spent the New Deal funding, I have noticed that it is able to function differently. As it is no longer a statutory service provider, it can be used as a vehicle to bring partners and interested bodies together to encourage creative and efficient thinking and working.

"B Inspired" only exists for the betterment of Braunstone. The Clean Up Braunstone campaign mentioned in chapter 2.4 is the ideal example, but my point could equally be applied to the play providers' group or the housing providers' forum. Ironically, now that it does not have millions of pounds that have to be spent by a deadline, it is able to inspire a much more co-operative approach to community work in Braunstone.

2.2 The Parish Audit

In 2004/5 St Peter's produced a parish audit in order to understand its parish better, using two methods. The first was a series of observation walks which noted all the amenities and features of the geographical area. The second was the statistical information garnered from the 2001 Census, tailored to the parish/NDC area.

The observation walks were carried out by members of the congregation, and every street in the parish was walked. Features of the local environment were noted, photographs were taken, and community facilities, such as post boxes or CCTV cameras, were marked on a map. All this was then collated and written up. The appropriate statistics were pulled together and identified for the parish (with the assistance of a geography student) and these were presented in a pictorial format that was both detailed and easily understood. The whole report was produced in a visually appealing form.

This very practical piece of work helped the church to understand its parish much better. It was received well by partner organisations, who valued the information it contained and found its presentation easy to understand. It helped that the parish boundaries coincided exactly with the boundaries of the NDC area, so the research was directly useful.

For many local people and workers the information contained in the report was not a surprise. Nevertheless all members of the parish audit steering group learnt something new about Braunstone every time we met together. Whilst out on our observation walks we would often spend time chatting with people in the streets. From these short conversations, stories from the past and present would emerge, showing that Braunstone people have a commitment to their community that cannot be conveyed in statistics.

For a relatively new worker the parish audit was a real opportunity to get to know the area, its geography and its connections. This could vary from how far one has to travel to the nearest post office, to where the concentrations are of households caring for a family member. For the parish church this information can help develop our mission strategy, and for the secular organisation it is of use to assess the gaps in service provision and plan where energy needs directing.

Whilst most of the writing up of the audit was undertaken by myself and other members of the staff team, members of the congregation got very involved in the observation walks, which meant that they were able to own the audit. Older members were able to put this snapshot of the area into a historical context. They were around when the 'Boot' houses were built and subsequently had to be demolished; they would remember that a particular shop unit used to be the Post Office. There were memories of some of the characters who used to live in the area, and we would often bump into people whom one of our team used to teach in Sunday School.

We used the 2001 Census statistics, and I discovered that some of these were out of date as early as 2004/5. There is a case for repeating the Parish Audit early in the new decade. This would allow the church and other agencies to see, not only what the make-up of the parish is at a moment in time, but how it is changing over time.

(The parish audit report can be downloaded from the Downloads page of our website: www.stpetersbraunstone.org.uk.)

2.3 Woodshawe Rise Tenants and Residents Group – Minutes of Meetings

Leicester City Council wanted to see more tenants' and residents' groups in Braunstone and this was one of the responsibilities of Lynn Charman, the community development worker for Leicester City Council's (LCC) housing department.

There were eight to ten interested people living in the Woodshawe Rise area, some of whom were members of St Peter's, and Lynn and I supported the group they formed, putting together notes and agendas. The group would meet regularly to look at a whole range of issues and concerns, focusing on housing and the local environment.



In order for the group to be fully recognised as an official TARA (Tenants and Residents Association) the city council had to adhere to certain requirements, including appointing a chair, treasurer and secretary, and taking minutes of the meetings. The Woodshawe Rise group, however, was dependent on a worker taking and writing up these minutes.

As workers, Lynn and I were not convinced that having pages of notes was the best way of recording minutes for this group. They were not always read before the meetings, and minutes are not always written in an engaging style. It would take time to produce them, and none of those who attended believed that they were able to do it themselves.

Lynn and I started to ask some basic questions, such as, "Why do we do them? Who are they for? And are they useful?" People did want the meetings recorded so that agenda items were not forgotten, and any actions that had been agreed were undertaken by the relevant people. After experimenting with several different methods for recording a meeting, we decided to write up short notes in a summary / narrative format, making it interesting and easy to read, and illustrating it with a picture for each topic. We kept to the same format and agenda at each meeting, and once the initial template had been produced, it was very simple to add information for the meeting concerned.

Here was a willing group needing to communicate regularly with the local authority about their housing and other local issues in order to improve their living environment. They were uncomfortable with the given processes, which included having to produce minutes: such formality was dis-empowering. We experimented and found a way to record meetings that fitted their purpose, and I did not impose a solution but introduced a process. This meant that the group was able to continue meeting and working with the council and other local organisations in order to improve their lives.



Logo for Woodshawe Rise tenants and residents group

2.4 The “Clean Up Braunstone” Campaign

St Peter's Church is in an open green area on the edge of the estate. For many years the church grounds and neighbouring field had been subject to fly-tipping. Rubbish was not being collected and cars were abandoned and often burnt out. The area was also being used for drug dealing. The local environment had become dangerous and unhealthy, and people were finding it difficult to get the authorities to clean up the area.

One of the first projects to come from the Braunstone Community Association (BCA) was a 'Brush Up' project. Residents could telephone the BCA and a team would come along and remove the rubbish. This was an extremely successful project and the response from local people was overwhelming. However, its scope was insufficient and a much more rounded and strategic approach was needed to create a cleaner community. Several locally-based workers – with some input from me in discussion with residents – began the Clean Up Braunstone campaign. They were Lynn Charman (Community Worker Housing Dept., Leicester City Council), and Roz Burch and Tina Barton (Learning Works, Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL)). We recognised that the campaign needed the co-operation of many different organisations.



The first Clean Up event was held around St. Peter's and included City Cleansing, the Housing Dept., the Parks Dept., Learning Works (VAL), Braunstone GardenCare, BCA, the Probation Service, Parklands Refugee Hostel, Crescent Junior School, Caldecote Primary School, St. Peter's Church and local residents. It was hugely successful, and cleared away a tremendous amount of rubbish that had accumulated over years, from twenty-five-year-old crisp packets to abandoned cookers and fridges.

Several more events were held on an ad hoc basis in other parts of the estate, and a programme was developed to work within local primary schools, who would often send a class of 30 children to Clean Up events. These activities were so successful that Lynn Charman and Tina Barton obtained funding to run a Clean Up project. This encouraged regular events and raised the profile of the campaign amongst the community. It involved children and young people in trying to change attitudes to rubbish and litter.

When the Housing Department transferred Lynn Charman elsewhere, and VAL changed Tina Barton's work focus, the Clean Up campaign was left in limbo. Together with the housing manager and the local police, I organised a few clean up events; unfortunately the education and campaigning work did not continue. No single organisation felt that it was able to take on the management of the whole campaign. However, organisations were often willing to put in small amounts of money to pay for refreshments and replace equipment. As a worker I helped keep the Clean Up campaign on the agenda.

When the Neighbourhood Management Board was formed in 2007, consultations were held and rubbish, grime and crime were frequently raised issues. The board then took on the Clean Up campaign. A sub-group was formed with residents, representatives from City Environmental Services, the Housing Department,



Neighbourhood Support Workers (BCA) and myself. It is this group which now organises the activities, together with a programme that raises awareness of the issues and encourages a cleaner and greener environment.

Reflections

This story covers several years, and much of the original drive and enthusiasm for the Clean Ups came from members of St Peter's and groups like the Woodshawe Rise Tenants and Residents Association. Their interest has been consistent, enabling me to keep the Clean Up Braunstone campaign at the forefront of people's minds. While most of the original workers left before any strategies and processes were evolved, with support from St Peter's I was able to hold the project and its ideals until the campaign could be relaunched.



This raises important questions about projects: where do they sit, and who is able to convene all the appropriate partners and organise the recruitment of volunteers. Clean Up projects need very good partnership working. In our case the Neighbourhood Management Board was eventually able to take responsibility for the campaign, but it took a long time to get to that point. In the meantime the vision was held by St Peter's. The Clean Up initiative will now develop in its own way, but if the group is to continue to have an impact in the community and encourage a change in behaviour, it needs regularly to review its connection with local people.

2.5 Playwork

Children have always had a high profile in Braunstone and, up until 2001, St Peter's ran a small after-school session on a Wednesday afternoon. It was led by the Rector and some volunteers from the church, and consisted of games, stories and an activity: it was like Sunday School on a Wednesday. The club stopped in 2001 when the building works in the church (to create a hall) meant there was nowhere to meet.

When the NDC programme began in 2000, one of the key areas that needed addressing was educational attainment. The Rector thought that the church could start a homework club that would offer an opportunity for children and young people to learn. In partnership with Learning Works and the Braunstone Open Learning Centre, we began to take some tentative steps towards a homework club. We met a few times and gradually quite a lot of children attended, but it quickly became apparent that a homework club wasn't addressing what children and parents wanted.



In late 2001 the BCA put together the 'Kidstuff' project and appointed a Play Development co-ordinator who was willing to take the project forward. A regular weekly session was held on a Monday afternoon in partnership with St Peter's. This ran alongside other play sessions in the area run directly by the Kidstuff project.

The BCA Kidstuff project finished after three years and this left a gap in play provision in the area for junior age children in Braunstone. St Peter's had well-attended sessions on Monday afternoons and I felt it was important to continue them. With support and hard work from St Peter's staff, as well as encouragement from Angie Wright at the BCA, the Monday sessions continued as "Kidstuff St Peter's" for a further three years, serving a core group of about twenty five children with funding coming from a range of small grants. Recognising that this structure was not sustainable, I sought to develop relationships with partner organisations. We supported Turning Point Women's Centre in putting together a play project that supports open access play provision. A project now provides regular play opportunities across the area. However, its long-term viability will always be slightly precarious, as funding for this sort of activity can come from a range of different sources. As always, funders have their own agendas and in many cases want a short term 'fix'.

Reflections

The demise of the Kidstuff project across the estate meant that there was very little provision for children between the ages of 8 and 13. This age group had been neglected by many of the statutory services, and Kidstuff St Peter's met a real need for the local children. Its value was enhanced by being an 'Open Access' service, where children were able to come and go as they pleased. Together with Braunstone Adventure Playground, we were the only organisation providing this sort of service. We campaigned and kept playwork on the local agenda, so that later, when the opportunity arose, we could help develop a better and more sustainable service with a bigger organisation.

St Peter's did not have the capacity to be a major play provider; there were other, better placed organisations with the infrastructure to employ and train staff. Running Kidstuff St Peter's on small grants was never going to be a long term option: it required a disproportionate effort from me, and St Peter's was not in a position to manage and support the organisation.

Running the sessions enabled St Peter's to develop relationships with several local children and their families. Some of our participants came from what some agencies describe as 'hard to reach' backgrounds; they did not get involved constructively with other projects and initiatives. Sometimes they had an unfocused hostility; we sought to dissipate that anger and develop an informal relationship with them, with the result that St Peter's became a place of safety, not a place to hit out at. We have not sought to solve all their problems, but have developed positive relationships that have continued into the teenage years and young adulthood. It is not unusual to get a "Hello!" from them in the street.

At various times several disabled children used the project. Many had a form of ADHD or displayed challenging behaviour, and we managed to provide them with a friendly and safe service. Dealing with this behaviour was a challenge to those of us involved; it was also a challenge to the church people, who saw such behaviour in their building and then had to clean up afterwards!

Kidstuff has been important to St Peter's as it strives to be an inclusive church, seeking to welcome everyone and break down barriers of distrust. The challenge to the congregation is how to remain connected to the real needs of local children and young people, some of whose behaviour we find uncomfortable.

There seems to be little money for play in its own right. Such short-termism is not good for project morale, or for recruiting and retaining qualified and motivated staff and volunteers. However, a sustained presence and offer of relationships through play is worthwhile, especially with alienated children and their families. Being in post for so long has allowed me to see positive changes in some of the children I first knew years ago; one or two of them have since become parents in their own right!



2.6 St Peter's Festivals

In common with many churches, St Peter's has traditionally run Fêtes and Bazaars. In common, however, with many such events, the number of people attending had dwindled to a smallish number of regular supporters. They were not reaching their potential, either in raising funds for St Peter's or in connecting with the people living in the parish.

An opportunity came along in 2004, when we organised the fête alongside a dedication and reopening of Church Field. This was followed in 2005 by an approach from Kingsway Flower Club, for whom we hosted their annual flower festival. The annual fête has grown to become a themed festival with exhibitions and activities that are able to attract a wide range of people. Church members who wish, are able to concentrate on the activities that they do well, such as making cakes and running raffles. And we work with partner organisations to bring about a day or weekend of fun and activity with broad appeal.

As well as raising much-needed funds for St Peter's, such events have raised the profile of the church amongst the wider community. They have also encouraged other community organisations and groups to take part. This has helped to showcase St Peter's as a church that is caring and active within Braunstone. Our "Rainbow Braunstone" festival (hooking on to the Slave Trade Abolition bicentenary in 2007) was a way for St Peter's to express its concern for our communities to be cohesive and life-giving: it was an opportunity for local people to get to know one another and learn about other cultures through food, stories and music. Festivals have also provided a platform for the creativity of our people, and a chance to try something new, such as flower arranging or painting.

Through our festivals, St Peter's has been able to say something about its mission, and offer a reminder for people of why the church is there. It has demonstrated its historical place in Braunstone, as well as its current role. And it has gone some way in demonstrating its Christian faith.

We have come a long way in developing our festivals into good quality events that say something about St Peter's, but it is an ongoing process. The development needs to continue so that church members catch the vision for festivals: they are not only about running stalls and raising funds, but they are a chance to share the ethos of St Peter's with the wider community.



Armada Festival 2006



Flower Festival 2005



*Rainbow Braunstone
Logo 2007*

2.7 The New Communities Task Group

In 2004/2005 it became apparent that the make-up of the population of the estate was changing, in common with other areas of Leicester. New people were moving into Braunstone, having been housed here by either Leicester City Council or another housing provider. Although the 2001 census statistics indicated that most residents in the area were White British, an increasing number of new residents were coming from a wide range of different backgrounds, cultures and religions. Places of origin included Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Zimbabwe,



Poland, Lithuania, Portugal, Russia, Greece and India. A number of service providers wanted to make their services accessible to these new communities, including the Housing Department, Braunstone Community Association (BCA), and Surestart. They wanted to help people make a home in Braunstone.

The recent change in the area's cultural and ethnic profile was rapid. Braunstone did not have a reputation for being a multi-cultural area, although it was always more diverse than had been acknowledged. Its existing population was well settled and there were several generations of the same family living within the same vicinity, unused to large levels of transience in the population. Many people who came from abroad have settled here and are happy, but others have moved away.

The New Communities Task Group was formed in 2005 to help organisations recognise these changes in the area's profile, and do all they could to meet the people's needs. They were also concerned about the risk of racist abuse or violence from a long established community receiving many new people. The formation of the Task Group allowed local organisations to connect with city-wide initiatives and the appropriate support groups and forums. The group had representatives from several local organisations, and people from city-wide agencies would often attend. I joined the group, out of my own convictions on the importance of community cohesion.

The group tried to find out who was living in the area; this proved fairly difficult to do. There is no central register of who lives where, and the census data was already out of date. The City Council's Housing Department could provide their information, but they are not the only housing provider in the area. Only some people registered with the local doctor's surgery, so their information was limited. Local schools also had some limited information: one primary school said that 21 languages were spoken by their children.

In order to get a picture of who had moved into the area, we organised a 'Big Knock' in March 2007, when workers in Braunstone went out and knocked on doors. We met people who had moved in over the previous two years, and asked them how well they had settled in, what local services they used, and where they went to socialise. This provided quite a bit of helpful information, along with some interesting stories.

Most organisations took part in the training opportunities which the Task Group offered. This ranged from training on providing culturally competent services, to training on providing a place where someone is able to disclose racial discrimination. The group also oversaw various smaller events, and some of us developed links with city-wide support groups such as

SAEMP (Somali African European Media Project). Events were also held for new residents, for instance during Refugee Week.

Blessed Sacrament, the local Roman Catholic church, developed a project to work with people from New Communities, using the Government's one-year Faith Community Capacity Building Fund. They have a large, diverse congregation, and recruited a community worker to work with contacts from within their congregation and beyond, to ensure that their needs were being addressed. Jan Wharton was appointed and we worked together quite closely – indeed, I was asked to be on her management group. Jan had a huge list of contacts who helped us develop links across the estate. But after only one year her funding ran out, and she had to leave.

Many secular organisations began to think about the religious needs of residents and consider their impact on people's lives. We as local churches were able to tap into the considerable expertise in inter-faith work in Leicester through the then Faith Regeneration project (managed by the Diocese of Leicester), the St Philip's Centre and the Leicester Council of Faiths, in order to support local community development.

The group had a bit of a stuttering start as organisations and people got to know each other, but over the group's lifetime a great deal of good work was done and connections were made. New community groups started (including an African Women's group and a group focusing on the needs of people from Zimbabwe), but after a time, Task Group meetings became less frequent, and eventually the group ceased to meet. Many organisations were concentrating on their day-to-day work, using what they had gained from being part of the Task Group. Moreover, progress was slow at times as it was difficult to get information. The small core membership of the group provided the necessary continuity, but in time many of those key people had their jobs changed, so that tasks were not followed through.

Although the Task Group fizzled out in the end, there is anecdotal evidence that the more recent arrivals are able to access statutory and voluntary services well. It is not clear whether we have succeeded in ensuring that people moving into the area are happy and settled and feel comfortable using local facilities and services. But St Peter's now has the reputation of being welcoming to new residents from (e.g.) Africa, who are joining the church in small but significant numbers.

However the processes that we went through need to be remembered, to ensure that the area's services reflect the needs of the population. St Peter's Church needs to be continually returning to these lessons as it seeks to maintain its connections and place in its community.

2.8 Door Knocking

A key part of community development is finding out what local people are saying and thinking, and helping to identify their desires and hopes. Public authorities are required to consult regularly with people before they undertake projects and initiatives. Indeed the NDC programme requires resident participation and leadership at all its stages. Unfortunately much consultation has been undertaken half-heartedly or too formally, often using marketing tools. This can often result in incomplete or ill-thought-out conclusions, which lead to unsatisfactory decisions being made.

Braunstone is an area where people still know each other quite well and are not usually thrown by knocks on doors or interruptions. This is in contrast to the newer private suburban estates such as Thorpe Astley, where door-to-door knocking is often treated with some suspicion. In order to begin to know what people were thinking, it was important to develop an ongoing relationship with people in the area.

I took part in many different consultation exercises during my time in Braunstone, with many different groups of workers and/or volunteers and many different focuses. We would knock on doors and get to know and listen to people, and they would get to know us. We might go for one particular purpose, but we would always be open to hear whatever they wished to talk about. For example, on one occasion we wanted to know what changes could be made to the St Peter's church car park, but one person we spoke to also asked whether there were any local bands in the area, because they hadn't lived in Braunstone long and wanted to learn to play the clarinet! (We made a note of this request, and did our best to help them find somewhere to learn.)

Questions were asked in an open way and there was always room for further thoughts and ideas. This information was always fed back to the people responsible for the particular consultation; we also noted it and often followed up the ideas given.

Door-knocking requires realism and honesty; it is important that people aren't led to have false expectations and that people are clear about who makes the decisions and what the options are. For example, when we were seeking views on the car park, someone suggested that a pub should be built there. The covenant on the land, which states that it may not be used to sell alcohol, would make this idea very difficult to put into action. This had to be made clear to the person with the idea.

Door knocking contributes to the area and helps ensure its neighbourliness. It is also a partnership activity: I have usually gone door knocking with colleagues from other organisations. Indeed, particular initiatives such as the New Communities Task Group 'Big Knock' was a joint activity of several organisations including Braunstone Community Association, Surestart, Leicester City Council and St Peter's. It is good for workers to get out of our offices and knock on doors, alongside a colleague from a different organisation: this demonstrates co-operation and mutual support, and shows that issues are best addressed when people and organisations research and work together. Many workers and volunteers (and I include myself here) find that door knocking is empowering and increases self confidence. And for a church-based worker, it conveys that the church is here to serve everyone and work for the common good, not just to get more members.

The question for the local church is, how can St Peter's continue to support 'door-knocking' initiatives in Braunstone with integrity?

2.9 Learning with colleagues in other organisations

St Peter's, as a relatively small church, has not been in a position to undertake its community activity alone. We have always sought out partners to work with, so that what we do is of good quality and life enriching. Playwork is a good example – we managed to keep a project going for some time, but knew that in order to have good quality playwork we needed expert partners. So we found friends and allies through the BCA and Turning Point Women's Centre.

As an individual worker I have valued the tremendous help, support and friendship of fellow community workers. There has been an informal network with a strong element of like-mindedness. Together we develop a degree of self awareness, not just of our own personal strengths and faults, but of the compromises, restrictions, tensions and biases we all have in our jobs, leading us to ask how we can live with these without short-changing the people with whom we work. The classic example is of a community worker employed by their local authority who demands that the worker sets up lots of resident groups. The residents might not wish to be part of a group, and may well feel that they would not be listened to anyway.

These relationships have led to some very creative pieces of work. One example is the 'Friends of Church Field' which held a bulb planting day in the churchyard and field in partnership with the city council and St Peter's. Another is the German Exchange, an early project where we took a group of young people to Germany for a week and hosted some German young people in Braunstone. Many of our young people had never been abroad before and that experience, even seven years on, has been seminal.

One of my key colleagues is Paddy McCullough, community worker with the BCA. He started working in Braunstone shortly after I began my time here, and he brings maturity and a vast experience of community development in neighbourhoods in other places. Paddy and I have found that we think in a similar way. We have spent hours reflecting on our work and its consequences, and that reflection encourages us to focus on the bigger picture. This has helped us reassess our own place in it, look at where beneficial connections can be made, and try to identify the points of change.

We recognised early that the heart of our work is a love for Braunstone and a focus on people; we have listened continually and developed our relationships in the community. We have also stored up a tremendous knowledge of Braunstone. This is very valuable to the effective community worker, as links can be made between people and projects.

Being a 'super-signposter' is much more than just pointing the way: we help residents get the right information and the tools to make their own decisions about their own lives. As workers we have approached our work without an agenda or, perhaps more accurately, without deciding on an agenda until people have really had a chance to say what they want. The job of the community worker is to enable and empower people as they move towards their overall aims.

Many organisations seem to work in a 'target-driven' and 'tick-box' culture, where a great deal of time and effort goes into meeting targets, often with the encouragement of funders and all levels of government. Such targets are the antithesis of true community development, as the required accountability lies with a powerful body outside the community. Targets are often guessed a long time in advance or set by a national body, which cannot take the local situation into account. Moreover, funds often have to be spent within an extremely short period of time. As a church based community worker I have been reasonably free of such restrictions.

This has been possible partly because the church made a conscious decision not to take any public money to fund my post. Regeneration is always going to have its controversies and there were times when the BCA went through turmoil and conflict. If my post had been funded by the NDC, I could have been seen as unhelpfully compromised, particularly as the parish church has a mission to serve everybody. As time progressed we recognised the privilege of not having government funding for my salary at all. Colleagues have noted my independence and freedom to take a more considered view of my work. Whilst all community workers are to some extent compromised and partial, such freedom has meant that I can be more flexible and creative in following the needs of the area as they change, and working alongside people without other agendas getting in the way. Colleagues have mentioned that my freedom has helped support them in their work.

My colleagues have also noted that St Peter's has deliberately opened its doors to be active in the wider community, trying not to be bound with its own concerns. This opening up is a deliberate mission policy of the church. It has been appreciated that we have offered our resources, which could be my time or our building, in order to support any community development and allied initiatives. The Woodshawe Rise Tenants and Residents group is a good example of this and Lynn Charman was happy to work with us, as she sought to encourage residents in their community endeavours.

Friends and colleagues help make community development happen. This co-operation enables people to grow and make life changes, working through mutual respect and smiles. It is often difficult to pinpoint my own personal contribution, because so much of my work is about what we have enabled together.

2.10 The St Peter's Staff Team

After Rajinder Daniel retired in 2001 the diocese redrew the parish boundary so that St Peter's covered the whole NDC area. In 2002 Chris Burch was appointed Priest in Charge. Ruth Souter, formerly the community worker at Holy Apostles, was ordained in 2003 as curate at St Peter's, changing her parish and job without moving house.

It would have been easy for the church to see my role as quasi clerical, being some kind of 'lay priest'. This could have stifled my ministry as a community worker, whose focus is on the service of Braunstone's regeneration and development and St Peter's part in that, rather than its function as a church. Inevitably, the vacancy between Rajinder Daniel and Chris Burch saw my role being partially distorted in this way; however, strenuous efforts were made by the new priest in charge to help me refocus on community development. I had support in this from the diocese and my management committee.

From the outset, the new staff team believed it was important to work together. We made sure that we all knew what each other was doing, sharing our diaries at our weekly staff meetings and working through any issues that came up. Early on, we engaged in detailed discussions of ideas and visions, sharing our different perspectives on our common Christian faith and concern for social justice. Sometimes we were joined by two volunteers in the church, Roz Burch (Reader) and Pat Ward, who are also theologically trained and gave valuable input to the envisioning process. One colleague commented that we valued and celebrated our diversity, whereas some other church leaderships expected everyone to conform to a common pattern.

More recently two developments have changed the nature of our staff meetings. I have been working on so many specific projects that deadlines have inevitably crept in, reducing the scope for new ideas. And the envisioning and directing role is now shared by a leadership team that combines professional staff and "ordinary" church members, set up as part of the church's empowerment strategy. The staff meeting is therefore more administrative, and most professional reflection on my job takes place either in supervision sessions with the vicar, or at quarterly meetings of my management committee.

The church has struggled with the management of the community hall. It was part of my role to manage this, and later to encourage the parish to take on the responsibility. In the 2003 evaluation it was noted that the hall was taking up a disproportionate amount of my time, and that efforts should be made to control this. The management committee have sought to prevent it being a distraction from other work, but the small congregation still struggles to find someone able to take on such a role.

We have never had to take a high-profile leadership role in the community. Braunstone has had a strong tradition of voluntarism and participation, and there are other groups with a long history in the area, including the Turning Point Women's Centre, the Braunstone Motor Project (now sadly defunct), Braunstone Working and various employment projects, numerous play groups and schemes, community groups, dancing groups and Working Men's Clubs. Many of these are well established with excellent track records, and enjoy the trust and affection of residents. In some other council estate parishes, the church has been the key voluntary organisation, developing its own social action projects. In Braunstone this has not been necessary. Being free of the need to be a service provider has enabled me (and St Peter's in general) to fulfil our role as "critical friend" and enabler.

2.11 St Peter's People

At St Peter's the focus on the wider community is prominent. We pray for the area every day, street by street. The congregation were involved in producing the well received parish audit, and “serving our community” is a key part of our mission action plan.

The congregation of St Peter's are travelling on a journey, learning to express their faith in their community activity. Already, some members have been involved in local tenants' groups, and others as members of management committees. Others enjoy coming to help at Clean Up events and church-run activities such as festivals and carol singing.

A church wedding – generous teamwork in action



A recent wedding at St Peter's illustrates the congregation's teamwork as well as its community involvement. A young couple from Africa had arrived in Leicester as refugees a few years ago from a war zone. They met in this country, moved to a small flat in Braunstone and began to attend St Peter's with their two young children. They wanted to get married and had very little money. Everyone at St Peter's rallied round. The church paid for the marriage service and

the congregation and other local friends organised and paid for the dress, the photographs and the party. They surprised themselves with confidence in their generosity. They had got to know a new family and demonstrated their support and concern for them. They also showed that good, meaningful weddings do not have to cost a fortune!

Several individuals in St Peter's have become more involved in the wider community. Since her retirement, one woman has discovered her creativity and has produced several pieces of art. She has become involved in a creative network and other residents' groups, and has developed new friendships. As other people's confidence has increased, they have taken part in activities and services in the church, such as reading in church or joining the pastoral visiting team.

Challenges for the church

The church is becoming stronger and more confident with events in its own premises. But it needs to be aware of areas of power and influence. In Braunstone, when St Peter's no longer has a community worker to feed back what is happening locally, how is it going to remain aware of what is happening, what is being celebrated, and what the points of concern are? Does the leadership team know where in the estate there is an outbreak of antisocial behaviour, or that there is an issue over public transport to the health centre, and does it know where to go in order to begin to tackle the problems or join in and support the celebrations?

3.1 Conclusions – Learning from my time in Braunstone

I came to Braunstone nearly ten years ago from East London, very aware that I was an outsider, and did not have any instant answers in my new role. I did of course bring myself with my experience, as well as one or two strengths and undoubtedly several weaknesses. It has been an enormous privilege to be in Braunstone and I have received so much from so many local people: to see people making so many positive changes in their lives is extremely humbling. My time here has been a time of receiving and learning from local people and colleagues.

When I first arrived in Braunstone I spent my first year, at the beginning of the New Deal for Communities process, going to lots of events and meetings, listening and getting to know people and finding out about organisations. This has remained an important part of my approach to community work. Some of the tasks in the original Job Description were guesswork, and could not be completed. For example, I was expected to put together an employment project for young men in the area. But it soon became clear that training and employment for young men was being addressed by the BCA through the Braunstone Working project – there was no local expectation or need for St Peter's to be directly involved. Instead, using the job description as an overall guide and taking opportunities that came along, I found that projects and initiatives emerged. It's as if there is no blueprint for community work: each area has its own unique character and the worker needs to listen and react to their own context.

Being a community worker requires pragmatism and patience. I worked with the situation I had and was responsive to current needs and desires. In addition, I have had to remind myself continually that things need to happen in their own time: one needs to be wary about imposing or forcing things. Often there is pressure, for instance, by a funder or local authority, to put a project together and spend the money by the end of March. We have seen groups in this position, distracted from their primary purposes and losing their way.

One colleague, now a City Councillor, observed that by being able to convene the voluntary sector in Braunstone, the church was extremely helpful in bringing them together. Latterly some key organisations, especially the Motor Project, were so concentrating on their own needs, they were not able to put in the energy needed for wider partnership working.

Over time I have discovered aspects of myself that open up my vulnerability: I have had to accept some of the flaws in my own character. Often the people we work with in areas of regeneration are vulnerable themselves, and not confident in many aspects of their lives. In order to facilitate learning and change there has to be a mutual respect. For instance a group of people may wish to learn to paint or do flower arranging, as part of their programme that supports their confidence and well being. As a worker I would not be expected to be an expert in flower arranging or art, but I would facilitate someone to come and lead the appropriate sessions, and I would take part in the activity too, sometimes making a fool of myself in the process. If we are encouraging people to make changes in their lives, we should be prepared to move out of our own comfort zones too.

Community Development is a vocation and my work cannot be limited to office hours; it is important that I'm available when needed. This means being content, for instance, to make and serve tea and hot chocolate on a cold Saturday morning in the park, supporting colleagues doing a consultation. Striving for inclusivity across the community is hard work, challenging, uncomfortable, but getting to know our neighbours and seeing real growth in cohesion is an unbeatable reward.

3.2 Further Work for St Peter's

St Peter's has made a commitment to serve its local community. For the last nine years while it has had the support of a community development worker, it has been my job to make links and contacts in the wider community and to identify the areas of power and influence. This should enable the parish church to continue to engage in its wider community. It needs to be 'in the loop' of all those local pools of discussion and consultation and able, alongside others, to feed into those areas of influence, such as the Neighbourhood Management Board, the Joint Action Group, the Play Partnership or the Clean Up Action Group. In this way, even without a full-time community worker, the church can be informed in its mission of social justice, and the wider community can be aware of St Peter's commitment. If necessary it has to temporarily hold the vision of a project when the local infrastructure may not be in place.

One of the tests when I do go will be, not how many of the activities continue, but how St Peter's continues to remain connected with those areas and keep abreast of what is happening. My departure, though a source of regret in the congregation at present, is necessary to empower them to become more involved in the community without me.

The church has an inclusion and welcome policy and, as part of that, it needs to ask regularly whether its make-up reflects its area and whether its activities, from worship services to community events, are accessible by all. Are people aware of St Peter's as a service for them, and how comfortable are they at accessing it? We seem to have welcomed and incorporated a number of people, from asylum seekers to same sex couples, who were initially uncertain of the welcome they might receive. But this is not an excuse to become complacent.

For the last few years we have been involved in playwork and have developed positive relationships with several local children, young people and their families. St Peter's needs to consider how it maintains and develops those relationships. Linked to this is how it responds to children and young people whose behaviour can be challenging.

The festivals we have run for the past few years have been well received and supported locally. They have however required quite a lot of input from the staff team and there is an ongoing challenge to the leadership and people of St Peter's, to catch the vision and "own" the cultural and proclamatory aspects of the festivals, as well as their fund-raising potential.

Door knocking is out of fashion in religious circles, mainly because of the activities of some fringe groups who use it for their own recruitment agendas. But I believe there is a real place for door knocking, especially in a community like Braunstone, and I hope that St Peter's will continue to be involved in partnership with others, in an activity that builds community by building neighbourly relationships, without imposing our agendas on people.

Braunstone continues to change, and it would be beneficial for the church to do another parish audit in the next few years, when new Census statistics are available, new developments such as the Brite Centre and Business Box have had an opportunity to "bed in" as community facilities, and it will be possible to see how community organisations such as the BCA have evolved.

The church should be open to be challenged by the community it is in. Only in that way will its message (in its widest sense, including our ethos) find an open response in the community. Our Mission Action Priorities reflect this (Empowering our People, Making New Disciples, Serving the Community), but the theory needs to be continually monitored against our practice.

3.3 Lessons for the wider church and society

I believe that some of my experience in Braunstone is worth sharing with the wider church and indeed society: experience which confirms the value of generic Community Development. This report is a reflection on nine years' work and in that time I have met and worked with hundreds of people, undertaking a plethora of different activities and tasks. Looking back has enabled me to place my work in its context and ask some fundamental questions.

I recognise that being in the same job for ten years is unusual in this line of work. This has enabled me to concentrate on my job and not get distracted by my own survival and needs. I am also able to take the longer view and recognise the patterns of change from a distance. It has also demonstrated the church's commitment to the area and its people. This is in contrast to many projects and organisations, including public authorities, when an average of three years is the norm. Regular changes in personnel, or organisations that only seem to appear when funding is available, are often viewed with suspicion and as a sign of disingenuousness. Having said that, I believe it is important that our contracts are time limited, because one of our aims should be to work ourselves out of a job. Three years is not enough, but (as I said above in 3.2) my tenth year and subsequent departure will be a crucial part of my role in empowering others to be involved creatively in the community.

There is a need to give time and resources to training and empowerment for local residents to effectively use the power they have gained.

A key theme which has come through my role has been the freedom I have had to do my job and not get distracted by other people's agendas, or have the pressure for immediate results to ensure the survival of my employing organisation (unlike many other voluntary organisations). This has allowed me to take the longer view and have the flexibility to influence change and at times to take a convening or facilitation role. While society becomes, apparently, more and more driven by the need for quick results, it is perhaps the task of the Church to be counter-cultural, to invest in the long-term future of our deprived communities, not imposing an agenda (religious or secular) but giving people the time and space to articulate their own agendas, and then helping them work towards their goals.

A colleague likens community development to being a gardener. A gardener tends their garden, waters and nurtures the plants to encourage them to grow. It's similar to the role of a community worker, who spends time nurturing and encouraging growth. The original New Deal for Communities vision was:

'Ten years from now, Braunstone will be a beautiful place to live. Local people will enjoy good quality housing, services and facilities. We will be confident, well educated and hard working. We will be fit and healthy and live without the fear of crime. We will be fully involved in, and own, the process of improving our estate, and will work with others who share our vision. We will share our brighter and better Braunstone with the rest of the world.'³

3 A New Deal for Braunstone, Delivery Plan 1999

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people who have helped and supported me in putting this report together, and contributed to the email & wiki discussions and interviews:

The Revd Canon Chris Burch

Martin Burch

Angie Wright

Paddy McCullough

Geraldine Connor

and all colleagues I have worked with, both past and present.

The residents of Braunstone

The people of St Peter's Church, Braunstone Park

The Diocese of Leicester, for committing to support this work.